



# OPEDA NEWSLETTER

Organization of Professional Employees  
of the US Department of Agriculture

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\*\*\* ELECTION ISSUE \*\*\*

June 2006

## President's Message

On March 15, 2006, Norman Mineta, Secretary, Department of Transportation, and Mike Johanns, Secretary, USDA, presented OPEDA an award for its contributions to the Combined Federal Campaign. This is a historic first. OPEDA took the lead in collecting funds from other employee organizations totaling \$7,000 and presented it to the Secretary.



Secretary Norman Mineta and Secretary Mike Johanns present award to Farook Sait for OPEDA's contributions to CFC 2005

## Public Service Recognition Week

On May 3, 2006, as part of Public Service Recognition Week, OPEDA conducted the Unsung Heroes Award program. Deputy Secretary Chuck Conner was the keynote speaker. He recognized the 12 recipients and the valuable contributions USDA employees routinely make to America, and highlighted the efforts of USDA employees during times of natural disasters. This program has been revitalized in the past three years. In 2002, there were only 3 nominations for the Unsung Heroes Award. This year we received more than 60 nominations, one from an agency administrator, and several from high-level managers.



2006 Unsung Heroes - Bottom L to R: Teresa Kelly-Reid, OCIO; Kathryn Vernon APHIS; Jo Lynne Seufer, RMA; Farook Sait; Roberta Hodsdon, FNS; Anthony Myers, OO; Craig E. Smith, OHCM; Bonnie E. Rose, Ph.D., FSIS; Mathew T. Moore, Ph.D., ARS; Top L to R: Randolph Joseph, Jr., NRCS Group Award; Dwight LeBlanc, APHIS; Quan D. Quan, NRCS; Carmen Velazquez, CR.

## President's Message (Cont.)

### Partnerships

We have established strong partnerships with five USDA employee organizations (Blacks in Government, Hispanic Americans Cultural Effort, Federally Employed Women, Association of Persons with Disabilities in Agriculture, and the Organization of South Asian Americans in Agriculture). OPEDA is routinely invited by the Secretary, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights and Agency heads, to provide input on issues impacting employees.

### OPEDA Operations and Finance

When I took office in 2003, OPEDA was in difficult straits. The first budget presented to me was a deficit budget. OPEDA's annual dues and other income totaled about \$115,000. Almost \$85,000 was spent on salaries and \$24,000 on printing costs of the newsletter, and more for mailing expenses. **There was no reserve fund for emergencies.** All expenses were handled based on funds resulting from membership dues. This was an unpalatable and unacceptable situation. In April 2004, I discovered that the IRS had placed a lien of \$56,000 on OPEDA for failure to pay taxes for the years 2001, 2002, and 2003. The staff allegedly hid the IRS delinquency notices from the previous President and Board. As a result, the Board decided in May 2004, to terminate the services of the Executive Director.

My immediate challenge was to remove the IRS lien. We also needed to keep the office running and we did it solely on volunteer power. The office was physically dilapidated so I secured help from various sources and refurbished it – new paint, new furniture, new computers and printers, and a TV – **without cost to OPEDA.**

First, **we have paid the IRS** and removed the lien against OPEDA. We have **established a Reserve Fund and placed \$50,000** in that account. We have established a tax free Scholarship Endowment Fund and placed \$5,000 in that account. The goal is to raise tax deductible donations for the Scholarship fund so the corpus continues to grow and earnings of the fund will finance all future scholarships.

## OPEDA Operations and Finance (Cont.)

We need to continue to manage our funds with austerity and make OPEDA strong and viable. We have approximately \$46,000 in the account for operational expenses. We eliminated salaried employees thereby avoiding the need for tax withholdings and tax payments. Along with the normal operational costs of an office, there is one contractor who handles the needs of membership dues, renewal notices, mail pick-up, etc., for \$7,200 a year. The Board plans to utilize individuals solely on a contract basis for any future needs. As you can see from the draft budget, OPEDA now reflects fiscal viability like never before! We will continue to make it grow stronger.

We now print our newsletter for about \$400 per issue. We will be sending the Newsletter electronically to members who are employees, put it on our website, and mail it to retirees without Email access, thereby further reducing expenses. Three student volunteers from George Washington University fold and stuff the envelopes for mailing, and provide office coverage.

## Membership and Field Activities

### **Membership records have been automated without cost.**

This has eliminated a lot of manual work. We have 382 retired life members (non-dues paying) 1170 employee members and 757 dues paying retiree members. Since July 2003, we added 65 new members; I personally recruited 34 of them. However, we need to expand our activities to the field if we are to attract new membership. For this reason, the Board has voted to fund the Council members for local activities.

## Elections 2006

I want to thank the members of OPEDA for giving me the opportunity to serve this wonderful organization. Although faced with initial challenges, OPEDA is now financially sound. I have worked very hard with the top leadership of the Department to raise OPEDA's profile. The past three years have seen prominent articles and photographs of OPEDA events in the USDA News. Agencies such as RMA, NRCS, APHIS and ARS have published pictures and stories about their employees receiving the Unsung Hero Award giving further visibility to OPEDA. We are beginning to attract renewed interest in OPEDA and we need to do more.

I offer to continue to serve OPEDA because I believe it needs to have stable, strong and vigorous leadership. Ed Dickerhoof, Holly Hambley, Fred Kaplan, Dawn Tucker and the other Board members who have served with me have made immense contributions to the accomplishments I have listed. I believe that we will be able to build on the alliances and networks established these past three years. I seek your vote and promise to devote all my energies to make OPEDA prominent, stronger and more valued and respected in USDA.

## Elections 2006 (Cont.)

My opponent George A. Pavelis is a well respected and long retired employee of ERS. With all due respect I share the following information. In March the Nominating Committee placed him on the ballot as candidate for President. On April 9, he wrote to OPEDA and me as follows: **"Owing to the desire to spend time on other matters, I withdraw my candidacy for the Office of President, OPEDA."** On April 20, he wrote saying "...I hereby rescind my withdrawal of April 9, 2006 as a nominee for OPEDA President..." We honored his request so he is on the ballot as a candidate for the office of President.

## OPEDA Program Priorities



Regardless of who the successful candidate will be, OPEDA needs to consider its program priorities for the next few years. Therefore, we invite you to look ahead and offer suggestions to help your leadership in setting program priorities for the coming year(s). Hopefully, our program activities make your job easier and you a more effective

employee whether you are located in Washington or in the field. As you think about activities high on your list, OPEDA's defined program areas will serve as a useful prompt and guide. The co-equal areas include: Legislative Matters, Member Recruitment and Retention, Member Services, Professionalism and Professional Development, and Public Service. Please don't hesitate to list comments that may not fit in a major program area.

## Mail Your Ballot

Please follow the instructions on the ballot. We will preserve anonymity in the election process. Make your choices and mail the ballot to:

OPEDA  
P. O. Box 381  
Washington, D.C. 20044

**OPEDA DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSAL, FISCAL YEAR 2007  
(July 1, 2006 - June 30, 2007)**

Beginning Cash Balance (7/1/06)						\$ 76,120	
Income:							
Dues:		Number	Rate				
Active Employees		1,190	52	\$ 61,880			
Retirees		760	25	19,000			
Lifetime Memberships		4	200	800			
Total Dues		1,954		81,680			
Commissions				300			
Scholarship Contributions				500			
Other				100			
Total Income						82,580	
Total Cash Available						\$ 158,700	
Expenses:							
Contract for Office Support**					\$ 40,000		
Membership Recruitment Activities					5,000		
Contract for Membership Database					7,200		
Liability Insurance					500		
Postage					3,000		
Copier Service					604		
Printing					1,000		
Supplies					400		
Chapter Allowances					14,000		
Contributions to Cooperating Organizations					2,500		
Transportation Reimbursements					600		
Scholarship Awards					1,000		
Holiday Reception and Unsung Hero Annual Banquet					2,000		
Other					1,500		
Total Expenses						79,304	
Reserve for Unanticipated Expenses						3,276	
Projected Ending Cash Balance (6/30/07)						\$ 76,120	

\*\* Proposed for services for Executive Director and other staff

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P. O. Box 381  
Washington, D.C. 20044